

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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The ABCs and 123s of School and the Environment

As much as we (or more so, our kids) would hate to admit it, summer is almost over and it's time to send the kids back to school again. Back-to-school is can be hard on the environment with the expensive and environmentally "unfriendly" disposable pens and pencils, flimsy cardboard and PVC binders and chemically-infused foam lunch trays, not to mention the idling minivans in the school pick up and drop off lines. Fortunately, back-to-school does not necessarily mean that you must abandon your environmental morals. Here are four tips to get the school year off to a great green start:

1. Think "Green" (and Maybe Save Green) While Shopping for School Supplies



Source: Jillian Kossak, NHDES

Before you head to the store, take stock of your child's school supplies from the previous year. Do they really need a new pack of pens or pencils? Chances are, you could probably find supplies scattered all over the house that your kids could use for the upcoming school year. Another idea for reusing school supplies that also incorporates a little end-of-summer fun is to have your kids invite their friends over to trade last year's gently-

used school supplies.

However, if you are looking to purchase new supplies, do a little consumer research and try to find supplies that are made out of recycled materials. Many companies incorporate recycled content in their pens, pencils and paper products and advertise this on their packaging. The good news is that due to the increasing trend in "green" school supplies, stores and manufacturers are recognizing the growing demand for eco-friendly back-to-school products, making such supplies more available for consumers.

2. B.Y.O.L : Bring Your Own Lunch

Before you send your child to school with lunch money, talk to your school district to see what kind of lunch trays are used. Many schools still use disposable polystyrene foam lunch trays that are damaging to the environment. Foam lunch trays are not able to be recycled using conventional recycling practices and they easily break apart. Once broken, the

polystyrene foam pieces can litter water bodies and may be ingested by animals. However, what should really cause alarm is that, according to Harvard University, polystyrene lunch trays are made with the toxic chemicals Styrene and Benzene, both potential neurotoxins and carcinogens. When foam lunch trays come into contact with heat, Styrene can leach into the food and then be consumed.



Source: Jillian Kossak, NHDES

So, instead of buying school lunches this year, have your child bring their own lunch to school in a reusable lunch box or pouch. Try using reusable plastic food storage containers as an alternative to plastic sandwich bags. In addition, always remember to pack a reusable water bottle. Bringing a reusable water bottle reduces the number of plastic water bottles added to the waste stream while decreasing the amount of petroleum needed to produce the bottles. You will end up saving money too because fortunately, in NH, we have easy access to safe drinking water.

3. Walk, Bike, Carpool or Bus to School

Did you know that if you leave your car at home just two days a week you can reduce your greenhouse gas emissions by approximately two tons per year? Before school starts, consider sending your kids to and from school on the school bus or even start a carpool. By carpooling, you will reduce the number of times per week that you use your car, which will save money on gas and reduce wear and tear on your car.

4. Encourage Your Kids to be Eco-Advocates

Talk to your kids about being environmentally conscious in the classroom. Ask your kids to talk to their teachers about turning in homework assignments, like essays and reports, electronically rather than printing them out. Many teachers actually prefer grading papers on the computer and some schools are encouraging teachers to grade online. In addition, talk to your kids about joining or even starting an environmental club at school. Taking part in environmental clubs is a great way to make lasting changes in school and in your community. There are even awards listed on the [EPA website](http://www.epa.gov) for students, and school environmental groups, who have gone above and beyond in helping to improve the environment.



Recycling Symbol Source:
<http://pamplonetario.org/2015/02/2015-talleres-recicla-luz/>

For more information, visit the following sources:

<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic967858.files/PolystyreneFactSheets.pdf>

<http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/wycd/road.html>

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